

PRINTED IN THE KINGSBURG RECORDER ON MARCH 26, 2003

News

City pursues upscale retailers to match population

*By Patrick O'Donnell
Recorder Staff*

Kingsburg will seek higher-end businesses

While the list of new businesses currently ready to open their doors in Kingsburg is short, development is happening in several areas.

According to Jolene Polyack, Consulting Economic Development Coordinator for the city of Kingsburg, things are coming together slowly, but surely.

"We are actively pursuing several retailers to locate in Kingsburg," Polyack said.

She added that when looking at the city's demographics, there is a compelling profile. Within a 20 mile radius, which is the approximate area Kingsburg pulls shoppers from, there are 477,830 people. The median household income is \$44,901 and there are 138,882 total households in the area. Polyack said all this is according to a 2002 study conducted by Applied Geographic Solutions.

"According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Kingsburg ranks second (Clovis ranks first) in Fresno County for median household income, percentage below poverty (we have the second lowest percentage below poverty), population with a high school diploma and percentage unemployed (we have the second lowest percentage of unemployed)," Polyack said.

She said that according to the State Department of Finance, the city's population is growing one-third faster than the rest of the county. What this means is that Kingsburg has a much higher proportion of husband-wife couples and families than Fresno County and a smaller proportion of one-parent families. Based on these numbers, Polyack is pursuing the more upscale retailers versus discounters.

She said that the city is not actively pursuing discounters, because those are already present in the area, and is seeking higher-end businesses that are still within reason.

"We're not going after businesses like Saks Fifth Avenue, because we realize that isn't a realistic target, but at the same time, we're not going after and targeting discounters like Wal-Mart," Polyack said. "What we have found is that people have and are willing to come 20 to 30 miles to shop in Kingsburg. People like coming to Kingsburg because it offers a clean and safe shopping experience."

There are several pieces of property available for new businesses. They include:

Several storefronts in the Kmart shopping complex. There has been some talk of a medical clinic locating there and Bobby Salazar's is still in talks to re-open at a location there as well, but nothing is concrete at this time, according to Polyack.

Larger parcels include the Kingsburg Cotton Oil property and the Johnson Lumber property, both of which are still vacant and seeking buyers.

Polyack said that in all, more than 57 cumulative acres of land are available for sale, most of which can be viewed from Freeway 99 at the Conejo and Sierra exits.

"We've talked with a number of businesses, but everything takes time. The majority of developments are still up in the air. The most active area is the 43 acres next to Kmart. The property has been sold and we definitely have people lined up that are interested in going in there, including a hotel, but now it's a process of seeing whether things work out," Polyack said.

She said that by the end of the year, the city should tentatively know what businesses will be located in the complex and once the initial infrastructure is built, things should start developing more rapidly.

Polyack believes it's basically just a matter of getting the initial 43 acres developed. She doesn't think they will have to do too much selling of the back end,, since they've already had some interest from businesses to locate there, but they just need to develop out the initial acreage first. For that, the developers need to get approval from the Kingsburg Planning Commission, which she understands they are pursuing.

"It seemed like the message prior to now had been 'we don't want business here,' but now we're seeing that we need more business revenue. We talk growth and people get scared because they think we're talking about housing growth, but we're not. It's about attracting retailers and in order to do that we must have a compelling story with enticing details," Polyack said.

She said the Economic Development Committee is doing everything possible to expand development. One of the things the committee is doing is developing contacts at the state level.

"We have developed a strong working relationship with Assemblywoman Nicole Parra's office. A member of her staff is attending our economic development meetings and joining us at other regional functions," Polyack said.

According to Economic Development Chair Steve Safarjian, "The economic development efforts for the city of Kingsburg are moving along at a much faster rate than in the past. We're confident that it won't be long before the economic vitality of the city will become stronger due to these efforts."

Kingsburg City Manager Don Pauley also seems to be satisfied with the direction things are progressing. He said, "We have a strong Economic Development Committee made up of community leaders. We have a well known, strategic marketing planner as our Consulting Economic Development Coordinator and we have city government embracing

the desire to have businesses locate to Kingsburg. Added to that, we also have more than 57 acres of available land. In every possible aspect, the city of Kingsburg is poised and ready for business growth."

In other areas of the city, Polyack said the committee has been talking with the International Center for Water Technology (ICWT), also called a "Water Cluster." This is a group of water companies and scientists who have formed a coalition to advance water technology. The vision is that this region will become the Silicon Valley of Water Technology. The city of Kingsburg is active with this group and is working to put forth a strategy to locate future water-related companies in Kingsburg.

There has also been much talk about developing a restaurant cluster for the city. There are currently approximately 35 dining facilities in Kingsburg, about half of which are locally owned and operated. Polyack said Kingsburg is on a highway and the culture of the Valley includes destination dining.

"We have more restaurants on Draper Street than any other group of businesses. It makes sense to promote a group that we've already got in place," Polyack said. She added that it has been suggested that a Kingsburg Restaurant Association be formed to jointly promote the cluster, thereby increasing the traffic to the city, but that this is something that is still in the works.

As a final thought, Polyack added, "Our strategy is to create a presence in several areas. When opportunities present themselves, we'll be ready to take advantage of those opportunities. Economic development is about covering all the bases and making as many contacts as possible. We're doing that now. Kingsburg is becoming well known to the people who can bring economic development to our city."

(March 26, 2003 Newspaper Publication)